

# **A Viking is for life, not just for Ragnarok**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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Games rooted in Norse mythology are ten a penny these days, yet in 1991 the same certainly couldn't be said for the Amiga platform. Before Heimdall boarded his longboat and set sail for chart-climbing stardom, all that had gone before was Fire And Brimstone, and Prophecy I: The Viking Child - surprising given the rich and abundant source material available from which to draw inspiration.

Perhaps that's it - there's simply so much convoluted and contradictory folklore in circulation that most developers found the prospect too daunting to tackle, hence we were fobbed off with featherweight plots that could be summed up in a sentence or two. Rescue the captured princess, and other hackneyed tropes of its ilk. Upsetting the apple-cart, undaunted Jerr O'Carroll and Ged Keaveney of The Eighth Day independent development studio stepped into the breach.



*For an alternative cover art interlude, check out Moby Games - the US release published by Virgin, versus its UK equivalent courtesy of Core Design.*

Heimdall - the second game they worked on together having each contributed significantly to the early development of Litol Divil - occupies the then unexplored territory of the arcade-adventure RPG. Think Bard's Tale Lite; an RPG for people who don't play, or like RPGs because they're stodgy and stat-laden.



## The story so far

Core's version of the Heimdall story is set deep in the ancient age of Ragnarok. There's been a hitch in the preparations for the prophesied Battle of Ragnarok, the legendary Norse conflict between good and evil. The evil god Loki has crept into the hall of Valhalla, conjured all his celestial relatives into an impenetrable slumber and absconded with three of their giant weapons: Thor's Hammer, Freyr's Spear and Odin's Sword. As gods can only walk on Earth in human form, Heimdall, divine guardian of the bridge that links Valhalla to Earth, must be reborn as the human son of hapless village virgin, Ingrid. During a night of thunder and lightning, she gives birth to a strong and healthy son and the quest to return the heavenly artefacts begins.

The action is divided into two separate parts. Three sub-games, which deal with Heimdall's journey from puberty to adolescence, are a way of building up individual character attributes and increasing your choice of potential companions. The higher you score, the better your chance of acquiring a heavy-duty back-up team.

The game section proper deals with the adventure itself. Armed with longboat, crew and some basic supplies, our hero navigates three island systems in a desperate search for the artefacts, picking up plenty of clues, and solving some seriously cryptic puzzles along the way.

### The One (September 1991)

**Q. A sprite very similar to Mutt Divil can be seen in some preview articles where the magazines showcased the concept artwork, though not in the final game as far as I'm aware. Did any of the assets you planned to**

## **include in Litol Divil end up being used in Heimdall instead?**

**Ged:** "No, we didn't use any of the Litol Divil content in Heimdall, Jerr had a distinct art style that was unique to him so the fact both games were driven by his art would explain the similarity. In fact we specifically couldn't have used any Litol Divil content anyway as that was property of Gremlin."

**Jerr:** "I'd forgotten that! But no, that was just my quick sketch of an idea for the combat system we used. It's just the way I drew back then. It was just a quick sketch and then when the PR dept came round saying, 'have you any images we can use?', that was grabbed. After being asked to leave Gremlin, I wasn't going to use art assets that belong to them."

## **Q. How did your relationship with them breakdown midway through the Litol Divil project?**

**Jerr:** "After we'd met Jeremy from Core, I knew that Gremlin wasn't the only option in the world. I guess I was a bit naive and just wanted a job making games. After the trade show in London my eyes were opened in general. So I was a bit of a young hothead and I guess they got fed up with me after a while. I voiced opinions etc. and left Gremlin with the words, 'you'll never work in this industry again' ringing in my ears!"

It's actually a game of three halves (he says doing a quick finger-count check); you commence with three character-building mini-games before progressing to the bulk of your quest split between a mixture of flick-screen and continuous scrolling 3D effect isometric exploration, and first-person perspective hacking and slashing. It may ruffle some feathers amongst the genre pedants, yet it hangs together rather well.



Working from a rented house in Derby, not so coincidentally home to the game's publisher, Core Design - Jerr and Ged, along with producer, Jeremy Heath-Smith, and 5 other Core development staff, initiated work on Heimdall in February 1991 with a view to a November release date. Between them - and Dan Scott who provided additional coding input - the architecture and design took just over five months to complete, storyboarded and animated first on paper and subsequently digitised and coloured on-screen, all driven by a custom-made engine and map editor. Apparatus that was written from scratch for Heimdall with the intention of recycling them for the already-planned sequel.

**Q. Mark 'Mac' Avery was cited as being involved with the project in preview articles, though doesn't appear to have seen the project through to the end. What happened to him?**

**Ged:** "Mac was working on Thunderhawk at the time and he helped with a few code bits which is why he'll have been mentioned, in particular he'd written some sprite functions for Atari ST that he kindly passed on for me to use, another wonderful human being.

The thing to bear in mind is Jerr and I were freelancers, we had set up The 8th Day and were contracting to Core to do Heimdall. People like Martin and Mac were working at Core itself but even with us being freelancers there was a great team attitude and atmosphere with the Core guys, so people like Martin, Mac and others were always up for helping us out and vice versa, they were a great bunch of people and I've got very fond memories of that time with Jerr and I as The 8th Day working with the Core team, it was a very special time."

**Jerr:** "He was a star coder in Core, working on a number of big projects, so I'm sure he was pulled away to work on

something else. As for nowadays, Mark is now Sarah."

The brief revolved around creating an accessible blend of arcade gameplay and the depth of engrossment fostered by RPG stalwarts such as The Immortal and Ultima series, gift-wrapped in sumptuous visuals to rival anything emerging from the Sullivan Bluth Studios.



## Tillit

Imbibing the mesmerising opening sequence like a grog-famished Viking, it should come as no great shock to learn that the illustrator responsible for drawing Heimdall's luscious cartoon quality artwork also played his part in bringing Don Bluth's 'All Dogs Go to Heaven' and 'The Land Before Time' to a cinema near us, before becoming one of Core's pivotal Tomb Raider animators. I contributed to the \$84.4 million box office takings on the opening Saturday matinee of The Land Before Time. Happy birthday to me! I was an emotional wreck after that!

"...in my opinion he was the best artist in the industry in that era, I've got some fond memories of working on those games together." - **Ged Keaveney**



*Jerr O'Carroll*

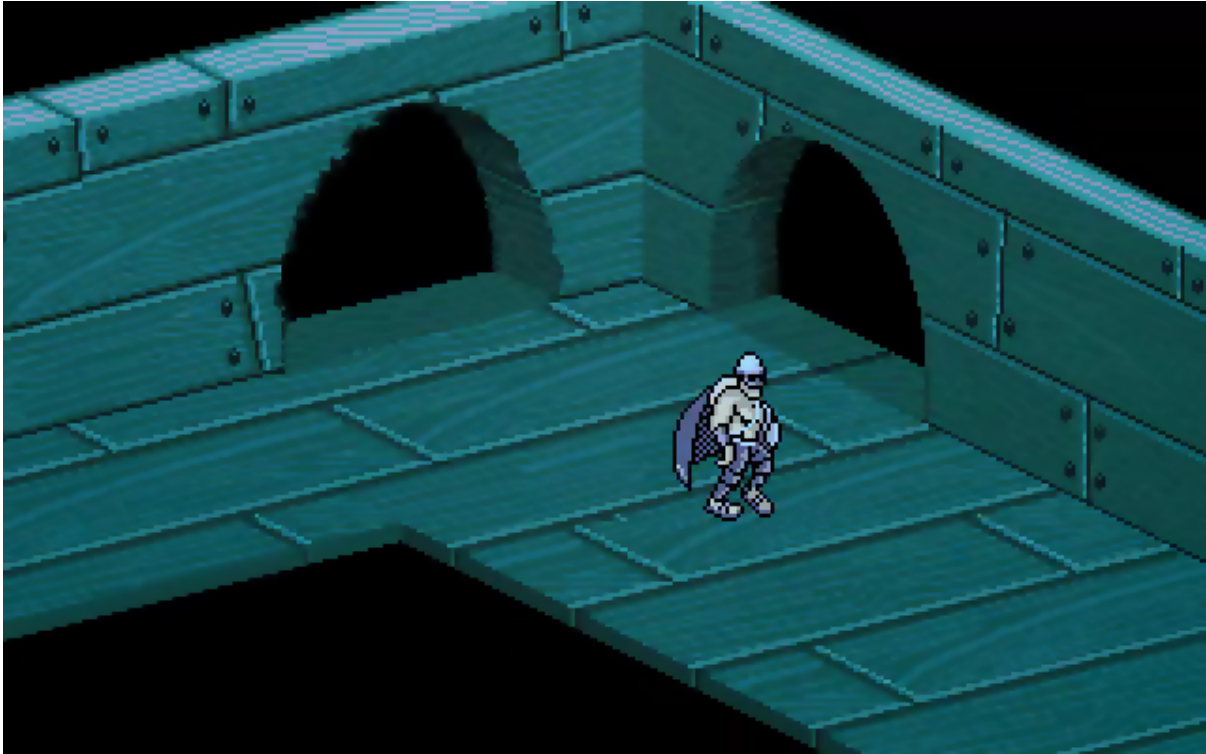
Heimdall is positively teeming with neat touches and seductive attention to detail - from the dungeons illuminated by flickering torches, creating a stark contrast between lit and shadowed areas, the rippling surface animation effect on the soup found in the axe throwing mini-game, to the absorbing *pseudo* day-night cycle and the fact that each painstaking frame of animation is comprised of eight sprites to make the isometric perspective feasible.



**Q.** What happened to the day-night cycle that was discussed in the previews? Was it cut to reduce the resource load?

**Jerr:** "Tech question, I draw pics! LOL"

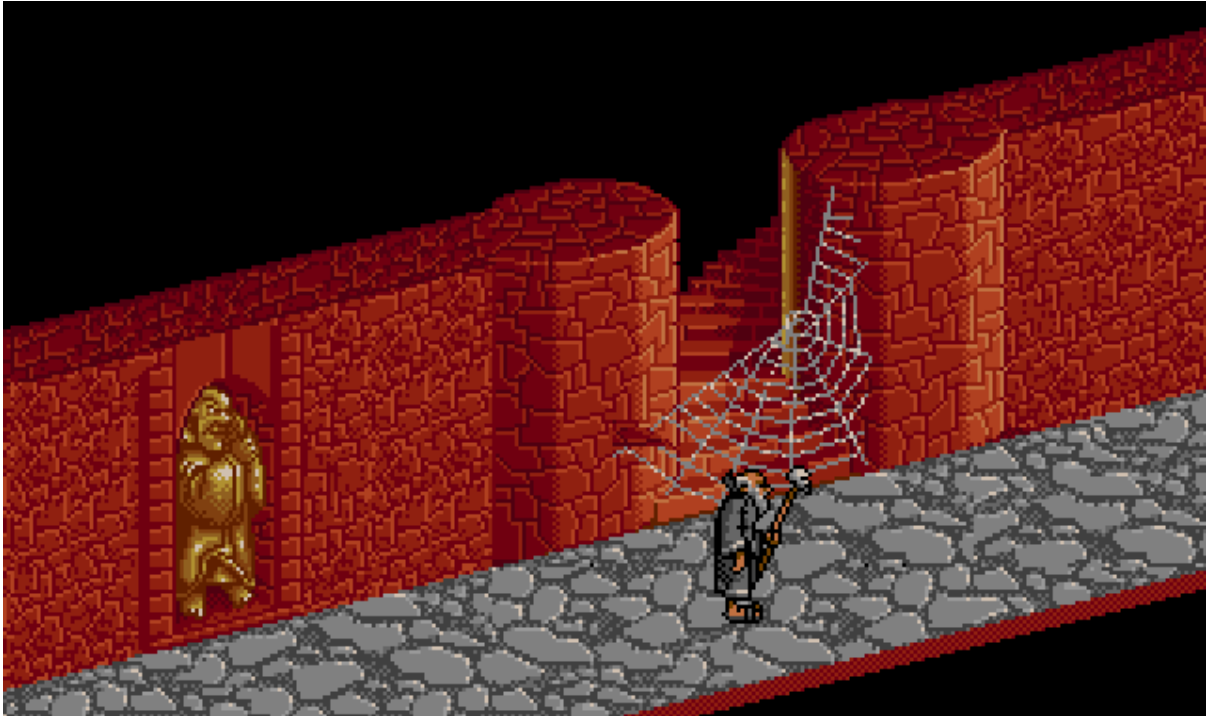
**Ged:** "I don't recall the plan to do any dynamic day/night changes, that would have been challenging on the hardware at that time. We did have some locations where the art was statically set at night time in Heimdall 2 though, we might have had some in 1 but I can't remember for sure."



*There are, and here's the proof. Mice grew pretty big back then!*

**Q.** Do the bronze statues seen in the corridors represent anything specific? I suspect they may be allusions to something I can't quite put my finger on. For example, there's the buddha/monk figures with their, erm... 'appendages'. I've seen a few real statues like that throughout the centuries where they feature strategically placed water spouts. Usually, they're part of a bigger fountain with a pool to catch and re-channel the water. Were you going for something along those lines?





**Jerr:** "Oh man. People have said to me over the years, 'what was with those statues?', and until you sent me the grabs, I had no idea what they were on about! LOL! The 'appendage' is just the other side of his jacket which separates beneath his belt, but I 'see' it now!! HA!! That's funny. It wasn't intended, but once seen, it can never be unseen!! By the time I got round to drawing them, I'd done loads of different corridor graphics, and was simply trying to do something different. If anyone was offended, I'm sorry!"

**Reply:** Sorry to burn that image into your brain! I *did* think it was odd that they'd get by the censors, while the original version of the axe game was cut, yet my mind wouldn't let me interpret them any other way. Now you tell me what the intention was, they look like the sort of optical illusions you see in psychology textbooks to explain 'multistable perceptual phenomena'. You know, Rubin's vase? Duck or rabbit? That kinda thing.





You could argue that the pitch-black voids seen at the edges of the explorable territory detract from your suspension of disbelief. However, I think they actually *nourish* our immersion in the surreal fantasia setting in that we can pretend we're floating in space as in Terry Pratchett's exceedingly atmospheric Discworld novels and adventure game. It all correlates nicely with Norse mythology when you consider that the gods perceived their world as a three-layered disc held together through their core by the Yggdrasil Ash tree, with themselves occupying the uppermost level of course.

## HIQm

While in-game music is non-existent, the introductory sequence is accompanied by Martin Iveson's electrifying bass-drum-heavy composition, accented with pertinent sword-clanking and grinding stone sound effects, transporting us right back to the era of barbaric raiders, colonisation and conquest.

Triggered by our untimely demise, we're treated to a haunting, melancholy electric guitar riff that's equally memorable, and strikingly poignant. Almost worth dying for.



Sound effects too are fairly spartan, though the optional echoey footsteps (toggled in-game with the F key) do add to the eerie ambience and sense of isolation, particularly in the dungeon environment. During the combat sequences, punches, weapon swings and their impact is punctuated by convincingly meaty thuds, crashes and yelps of pain.



**Q.** In preview articles Martin Walker was credited with composing the music, though was later replaced by Martin Iveson. Why was this?

**Jerr:** "I've no idea. We shared a house out of Core while making this. We had a small company called The 8th Day,

we weren't actually 'part' of Core, so we didn't see too many of the in house staff. At the start at least."

**Ged:** "I don't remember to be honest, it might be because Martin Iveson joined Core a bit later and was assigned to the project, so in the early previews Martin Walker was mentioned by Core. I only ever remember working on sound effects and music with Martin Iveson during development though, he did an amazing job and was a joy to work with."



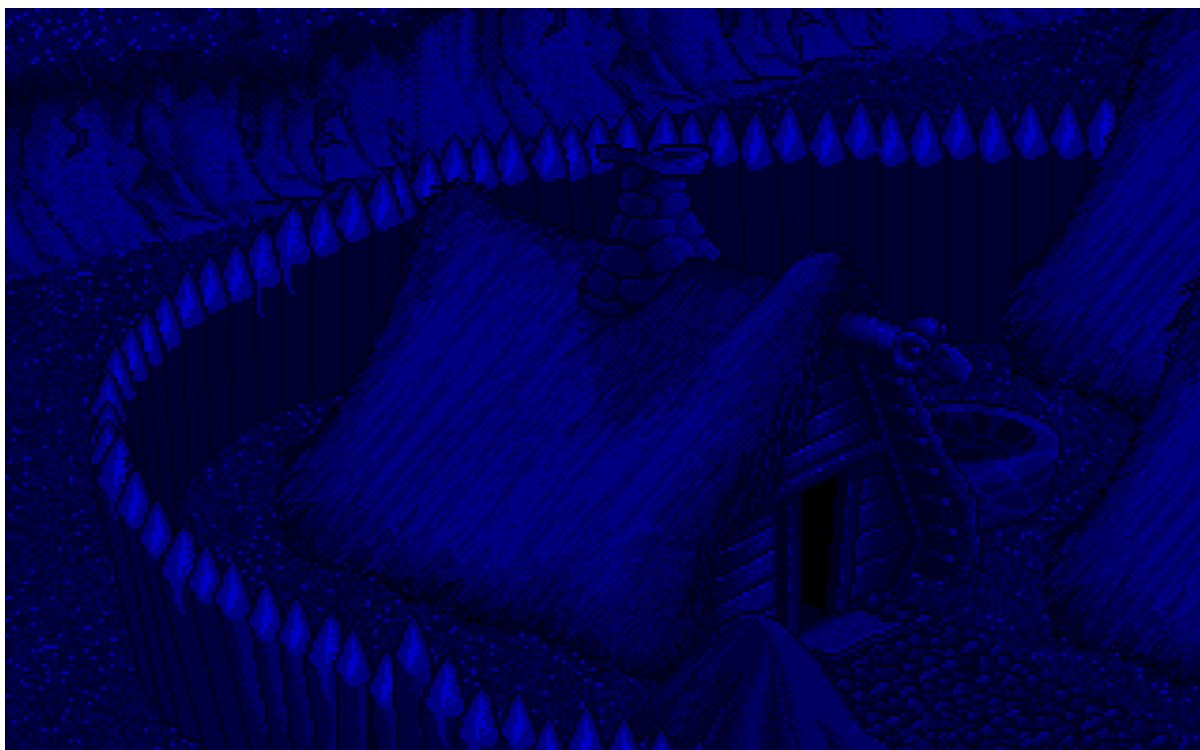
## Froedi

The epic Battle of Ragnarok is swiftly approaching and the dark, evil, gods of naughtiness are getting antsy because the good guys are beginning to look like the stronger team. To even up the balance, Loki - the God of Mischief and brother of Thor, God of Thunder - sneaks into town, hypnotizes his victims and pilfers Thor's hammer, the sword belonging to Odin, God of the Skies, and the spear of Freyr, the fertility god, squirreling them away where gods fear to tread. Earth that is - leave Valhalla to set foot in the land of the mortals and they become one themselves, powerless and vulnerable to payback.

Unfortunately, Heimdall - guardian of the rainbow bridge known as Bifrost connecting Asgard to earth - suffers from the same frailty and so must be reborn as a human in order to noodle about the earth. Clearly playing the long game, Thor conjures up a tumultuous storm under which a lightning bolt strikes seemingly at random a village hut at the northern tip of



Norway, thereby effectuating the immaculate nine-month-advanced conception of its resident, Ingrid, a virgin maid. What if a bloke had lived there? *That* could have been awkward!

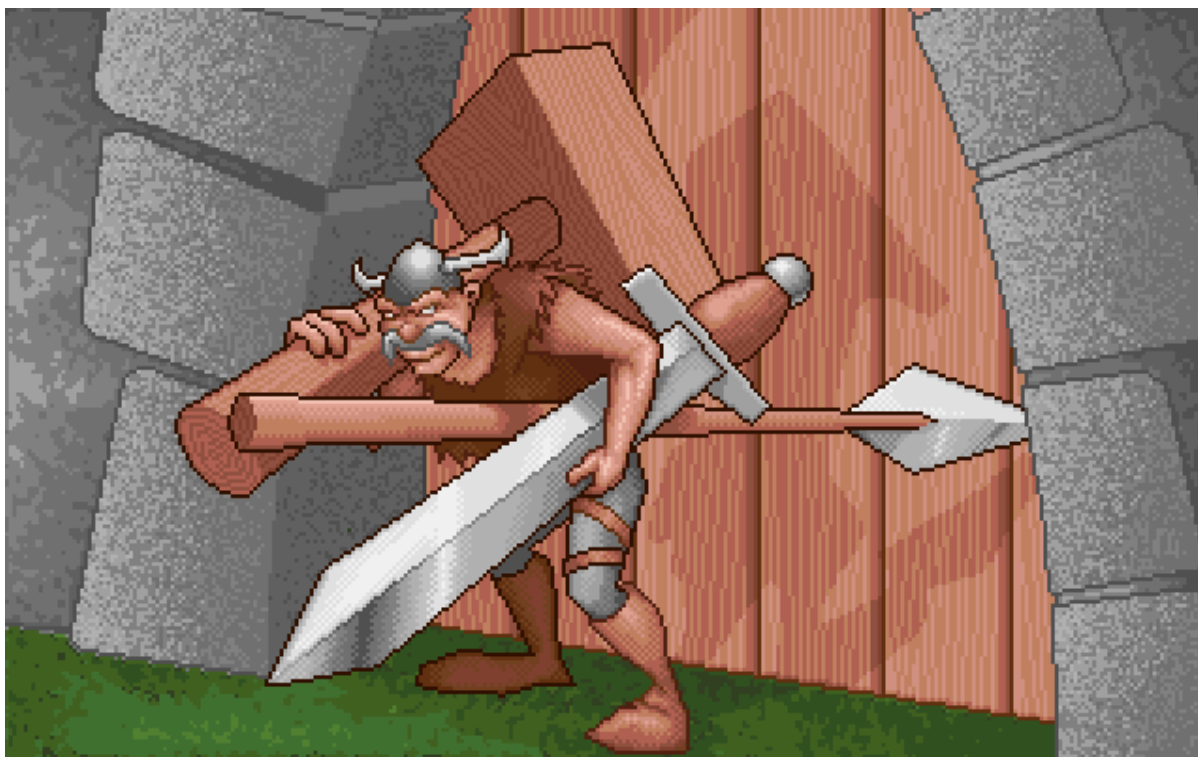




Before she can call the Court of Human Rights, Heimdall is reborn and packed off to be raised on earth by the Vikings, whom the deities previously moulded as time-killing playthings before growing tired of their trivial antics. Earth also exists courtesy of the gods, who created it so humans wouldn't get under their feet in Valhalla. Ditto the 'The 8th Day'. Ah, it all becomes clear now. The stained glass window design too - an Easter egg interwoven into the story's fabric so Core would have no grounds to insist on its removal. Clever.



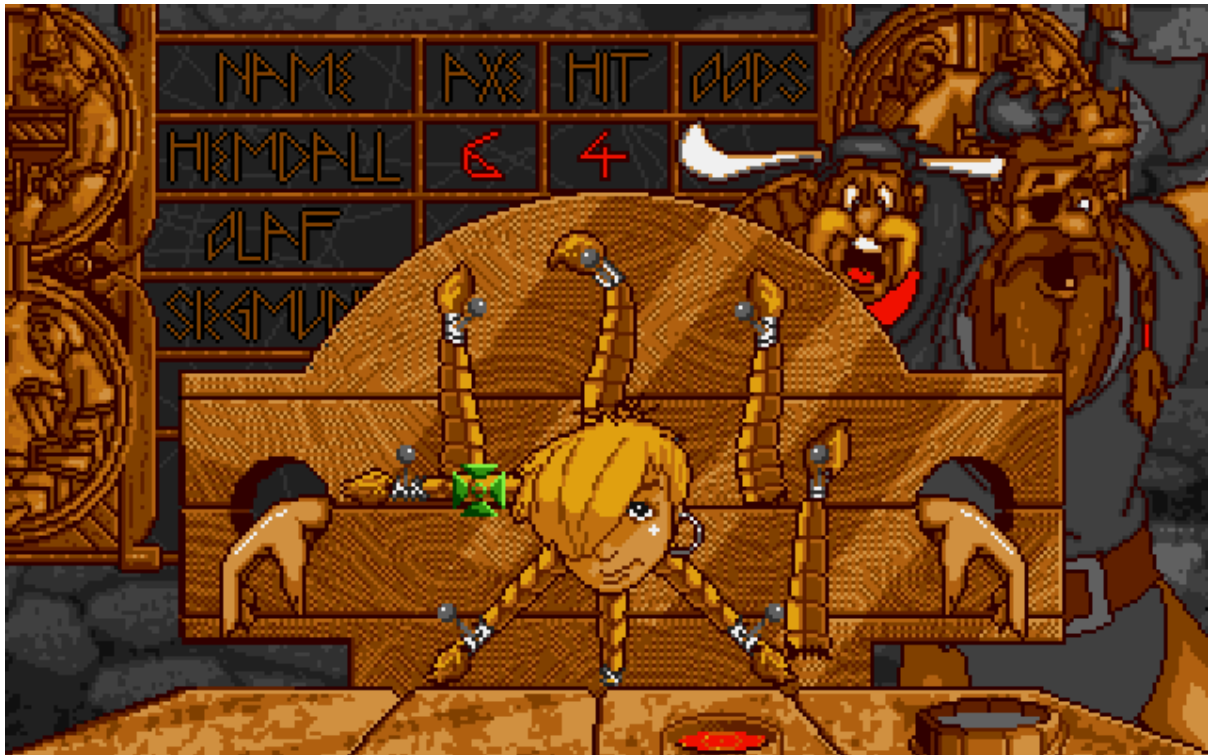
The master-plan entails waiting patiently while Heimdall grows through puberty into a fearsome warrior capable of captaining a ship crewed with utile comrades, setting sail across the Norse islands to recover the stolen cache. Destiny fulfilled, the balance between good and evil restored. Well, assuming the battle to end all battles goes smoothly - that *is* why the reconnaissance mission is so crucial after all. What if Loki brings a rocket launcher to the fight? Didn't think of that, did you Thor?



A smidgen of artistic license may have been taken with customary Norse mythology, though as the lore has filtered down through the aeons by way of Chinese whispered fairy tales, who are we to quibble?

This prelude is expounded in the introductory sequence via stills and title cards, though also in the exquisitely hand-drawn comic book style manual. Aesthetically speaking it appears to be highly polished, monochrome, final draft concept art captioned with narrative. I don't think I've ever been excited about a computer game manual before - there's a first for everything!

## **Lagr-leikr**



First of the mini-games is an axe-throwing sequence where you're tasked with severing the pegged out pigtailed of barmaid, Helga, who has had her head thrust through the centre of a circular stock making it impossible for her to squirm loose. The design was inspired by the 'Odin's Test for Unfaithful Wives' scene (or so I thought) from the 1958 movie, *The Vikings*, produced by and starring Kirk Douglas. You can find the clip on YouTube - the name of the abused actress is Almut Berg.





Essentially it's pub darts Viking style, and of course, the booze has been flowing profusely so you're as inebriated as a newt... I believe the phrase is. You get 10 axes to dissect 8 pigtails allowing for only a couple of misses if you're to release the poor damsel. The game ends when you run out of axes or cut her free.

Originally a head-on collision would have resulted in a splattered mess of blood and grey matter, as you might imagine if you hurled a hefty medieval axe directly into someone's face. For the sake of taste and decency, this aspect of the mini-game was intended to be switched with a censored version early on in its development.



If you play the finished game today and your axe goes astray, Helga swiftly pulls her head free from the stocks milliseconds before the axe makes contact, revealing that she was wearing detachable hair extensions all along... so all perfectly safe then. These Vikings aren't quite as uncouth as we thought after all.

It's interesting to note that the PC version of Heimdall included the axe throwing mini-game as a standalone executable package so you could play without booting into the main game itself. It was also featured on various cover disks as part of its promotional campaign (Amiga Action issue 27, and the PC version delivered with ACE issue 55). Please note, Everything Amiga cannot be held liable for any damage caused by attempting to cut out and fold the image on page 21 of Amiga Action issue 27.

'Viking darts' must be considered the ultimate party game given that it was embraced by both GamesMaster and Sky One's Games World where it featured in their regular challenge sections. Dave 'The Games Animal' Perry grappled with it in

Games World's 'Beat The Elite Special' in series 2, while pro darts player, Eric 'The Crafty Cockney' Bristow, took up the mantle in series 1 episode 4 of GamesMaster. In each case the mini-game was modified to allow the use of unlimited axes. Ironically, it was Bob Mills - host of Games World at the time - who sounded drunk rather than the contestant, but then he always did slur his speech, night or day.

McAllister recalls a game called Heimdall, which featured a Viking girl tied to a set of stocks by her hair. "You had to throw axes at her head to cut the braids and release her," he says. "And of course every other axe would land straight in her head, which we all thought was hilarious."

### **Cameron McCallister, GamesMaster director**

"That was outrageous," says Hewland. "We had all these mothers writing in." But she took that as a good sign: "If we didn't get onto Right to Reply at least once a series, we weren't doing our job right."

### **Jane Hewland, GamesMaster creator** (GamesMaster: The Inside Story)

You can relive the magic now in your browser via the Flash reinterpretation by Recorded Amiga Games' 'Ironclaw'. Well, until Flash is retired anyway. A version of 'Save the Maiden' can also be purchased for modern mobile and desktop platforms. Hang on a minute, how is it all of a sudden we're *saving* the maiden? Shouldn't the official title be something along the lines of 'Abuse the Maiden for Sport'? I don't think throwing industrial-strength axes at her bonce is helping her cause in any way!



**Q.** Was anything else besides the braid cutting mini-game inspired by Kirk Douglas's The Vikings?

**Jerr:** "The braid cutting! LOL, I remember watching that film and thinking that'd make a great game. Of all the intro games, that's by far the best one. It was used on some TV game show for a while, I think Eric Bristow, the darts player came on to have a go. Originally, the hair was attached to her head, and when the axe took her out there was a huge splat of blood. There's a magazine cover disk that had it on. But the powers that be thought it better that the blood was taken down a notch, and the braids became fake and she pulled her head out of harm's way before the axe could touch her. I think the Viking film also had a sequence where they ran across the oars? So the boat game I guess was sort of based on that."

**Ged:** "The axe throwing section wasn't inspired by The Vikings, it was inspired by the Erik the Viking movie, there's a berserker party scene with it in. Jerr and I watched a bunch of Viking related movies as research whilst we were designing it and absolutely loved that movie. We drew a number of general ideas from the various movies and books, the axe throwing was one of the more specific ones. The pig chasing section was Jerr's idea if I recall but I can't remember if it was inspired by anything in particular. Same for the boat jumping. The characters and storyline were obviously based in Viking mythology but in particular from the works of Snorri Sturluson."





*Helga (played by Samantha Bond) as portrayed in the 1989 Erik the Viking movie directed and produced by Terry Jones, starring Tim Robbins.*



*Kirk Douglas 'running the oars' in the 1958 movie, The Vikings.*



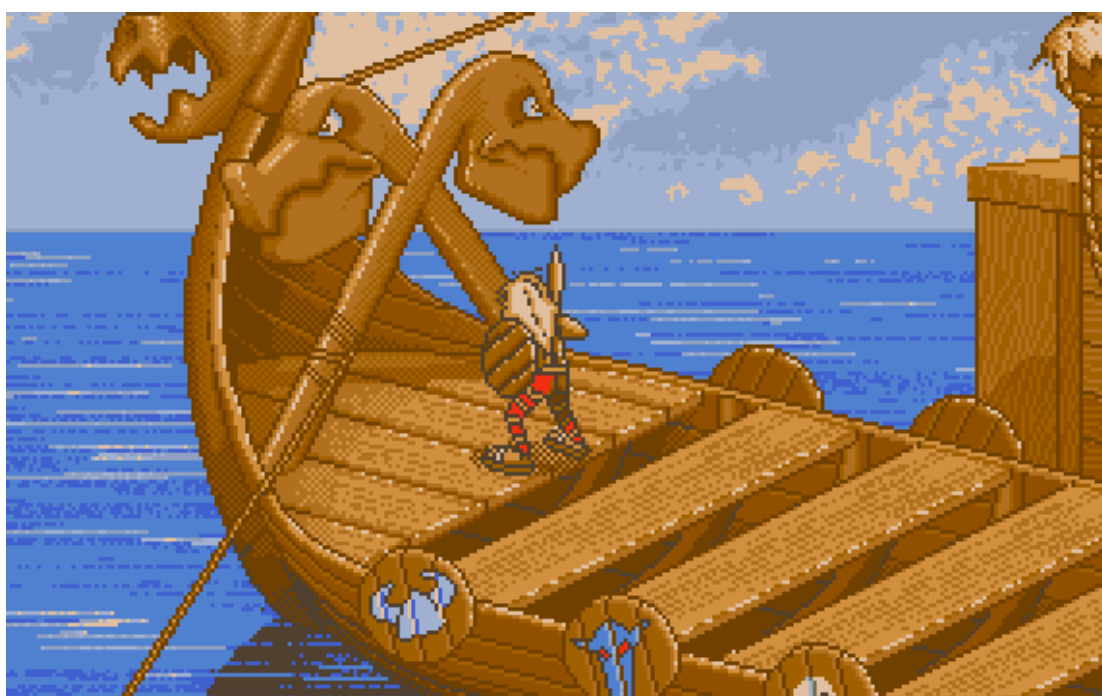
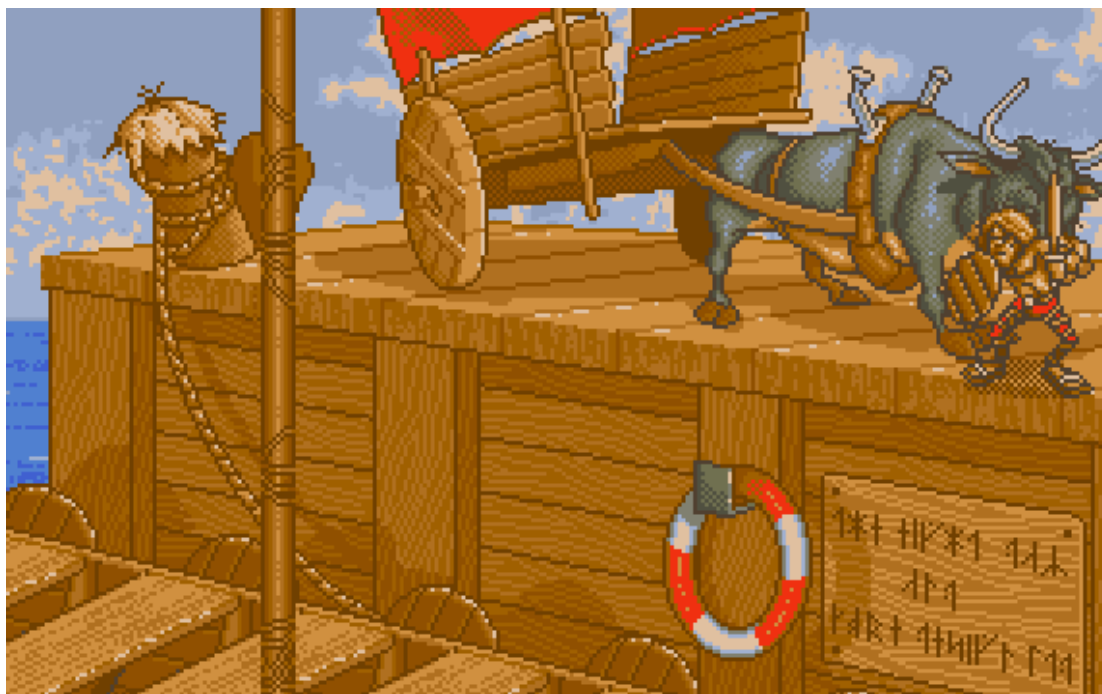
**Ged:** "Regarding the axe throwing section, that was the first thing we implemented in the game to show as a proof of concept to Core. Jerr and I did the original version which actually had the girl's head being split open with blood splats if you messed up. Unfortunately, Jez at Core was uncomfortable with it being in the released version as it might have affected age rating, even though it was cartoon style, which was a shame but understandable at the time. For the final version that ended up in the game I didn't have time to sort them so Dan Scott made the axe throwing section more age rating friendly and also implemented the other two mini-games."



Next up is the boar chasing mini-game where - still wobbling from the after-effects of the inn's strong ale - the goal is to catch the greased up blighter against a time limit. Your remaining time is represented by a spinning axe that hurtles from the left side of the screen to the right. When cornered, the crafty oinker bolts right at you sending you sprawling in the mud.

Finally, you must traverse the length of a Viking longboat from stern to bow and back again collecting a sack of gold coins en route. Not as easy as it sounds given it's manned by a crew of hostile armed guards who'd like nothing more than to introduce you to any sharks that may be circling below, waiting for lunch! Did you spot the rubber ring life preserver? Those Vikings, always so preoccupied with health and safety regulations.

You can opt to dodge around them, or knock them into the water with your trusty sword. Whatever you decide, do it quickly because you're up against the egg timer... well another spinning axe technically.

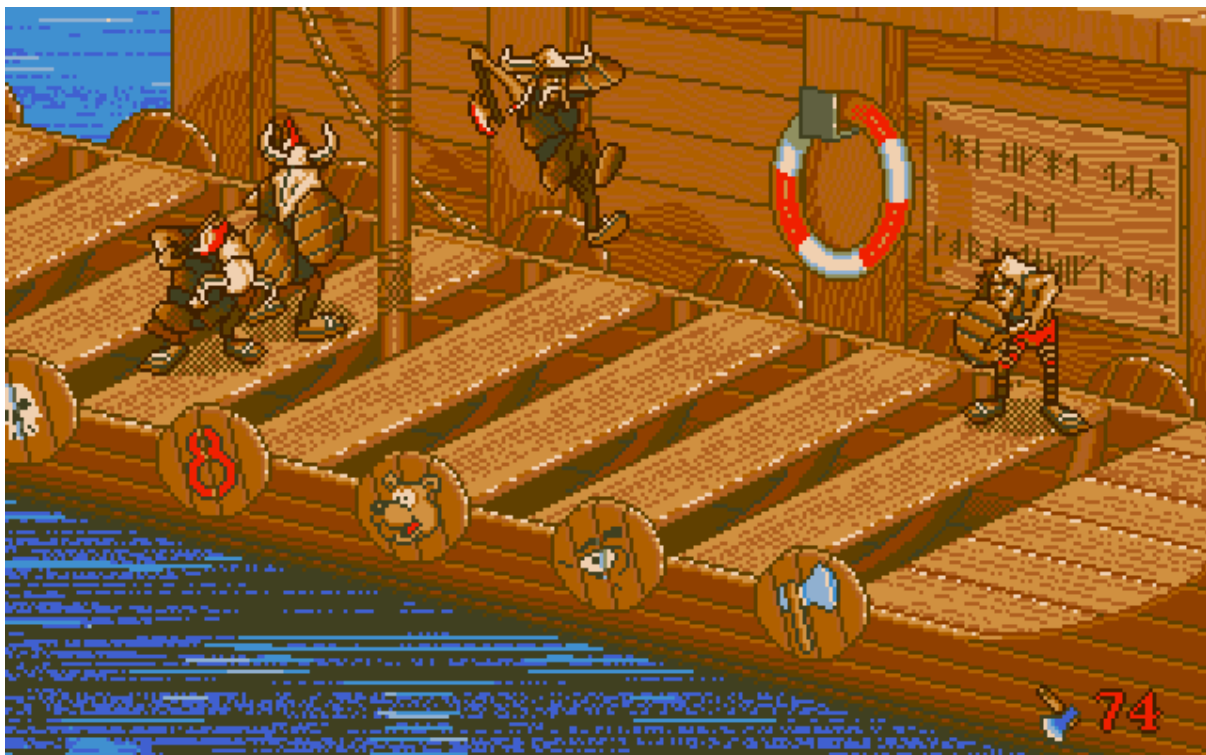


## DEVELOPER Q&A

**Q.** A cartoon bear can be seen on one of the shields in the longboat mini-game. Is that an Easter egg of some kind? Does it have any particular significance?

**Ged:** "None that I'm aware of."

**Jerr:** "No, it has no significance. I guess it didn't really fit in with Viking mythology etc. but it was just a daft graphic to adorn a shield!"





Perform well in the above tasks and it will be reflected in your attribute score, comprising your health, agility, strength and so on, which also determines the calibre of compatriots from which you can select. Skip the mini-games altogether (a selectable option from the title screen) and you can still proceed to the main game, though you'll automatically be allocated an attribute score of 50% and only be able to choose from half of the 30 candidates.

OPTIONS		<b>Heimdall</b> chieftain		<b>Aeigr</b> warrior		<b>Ormr</b> wizard
Use		level : 1		level : 1		level : 1
Examine		health.....50		health.....25		health.....15
Distribute		str .....50		str .....35		str .....20
Discard		dex .....50		dex .....35		dex .....21
Eat/Drink		luck.....50		luck.....15		luck.....21
		runelore .45		runelore .0		runelore .22
		xp.....0		xp.....0		xp.....0
Give		<b>Yimnä</b> shipwright		<b>Järnes</b> navigator		<b>Olaf</b> druid
Use Spell		level : 1		level : 1		level : 1
SaveGame		health.....15		health.....17		health.....13
LoadGame		str .....36		str .....22		str .....5
Text State		dex .....10		dex .....27		dex .....25
Bar State		luck.....18		luck.....42		luck.....13
Exit		runelore .0		runelore .10		runelore .32
		xp.....0		xp.....0		xp.....0

Your party comprises 6 members including yourself - the chieftain - though you can only take 2 of them with you on excursions, while the remaining 3 stay by your boat. The cast includes a wizard, thief, ranger, blacksmith, berserker, warrior,

navigator, cleric, druid, shipwright, and so on, each embodying a variety of balanced strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the navigator is extremely useful for overseeing safe journeys across the sea as he can advise you of any threats you may encounter, or whether your men have sufficient supplies such as food to survive the trip.

"The route to this island is too far or too dangerous to sail."

You can view the current attribute status of your chosen quintuple of companions (along with your own) by checking out their status panels from the items screen. There you will see the relevant statistics delineated in numerical and bar chart form, broken down into level (up to a maximum of 8), health, strength, dexterity, luck, runelore, and xp (experience points).



**Q.** The face icon for one of the selectable characters is a digitised photograph rather than pixel art to match the rest. Is that one of the developers?



*If this is you, I'd love to hear from you ...and I did! (Google Spookyville eab heimdall)*

**Jerr:** "As far as I remember that was a competition winner? The prize was to have your face in the game. Anything to get awareness of the game out before it was launched!!!"

**Ged:** "Hmm, I'm trying to remember that one. I think it was actually from a competition run by Core where the winner got their face digitised and added to the game. Just before Heimdall, Core had released Corporation and part of the promo for that had included people being able to get their faces put in the game in a similar manner. I think they got more people asking for it than they expected though as I remember Mark Price spending days having to digitise hundreds of passport photos, save them out and send the disks back to the people. That's probably why we limited it to a single winner."



Spot the mysterious place-holder graphic in the bottom left segment of the character screen included in Amiga Action's review (issue 27, December 1991). Just a shame they forgot to explain the significance of it... not that they were the only ones!

If you have a winning formula, stick with it - see CU Amiga's preview of Corporation (July 1990), and ACE's review (issue 36, September 1990).



## **BjQd**

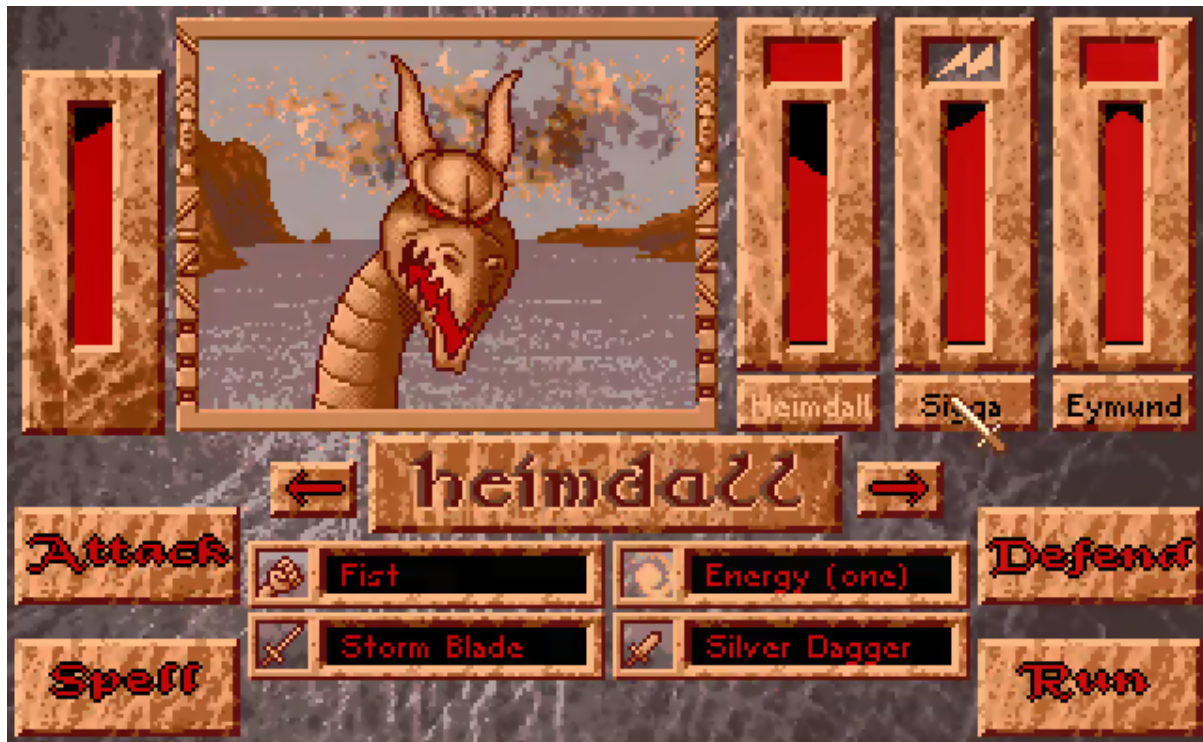
The isometric portions of the game are where you'll spend the bulk of your time, wandering back and forth between locations, harvesting useful supplies and sustenance, and picking fights with local bystanders. You control a single member of your party at once, though can switch at will between the three you've chosen to take with you (using the F2 key) as you explore the labyrinthine caverns, tunnels, villages, and innards of the Nordic thatched cottages. Early on in Heimdall's development the game also included a vast maze in which to lose yourself, though had to be purged as it taxed the Amiga's resources to an unmanageable extent.

Memory limitations aside, given that the finished game occupies 5 disks (the first one for the intro alone) and demands much swapping, this was likely for the best, despite Heimdall being perfectly capable of utilising 3 disk drives simultaneously.

Split between three mythological worlds - Midgard (the world of men where you'll find Thor's hammer), Utgard (the land of giants where Frey's spear is hidden) and Asgard (the home of the gods and resting place of Odin's sword) - there are 35 archipelagos to investigate, all accessed by boat via an Indiana Jones-esque map navigation title screen.



It makes logical sense to visit nearby islands first to ensure you possess sufficient food supplies to reach them, so you'll find you travel in a linear path, avoiding whirlpools and sea serpents as you go along.



Meatheads to the left of me, necromancers to the right, here I am stuck in the middle with you. Heimdall gives you the choice to make your game more action or sorcery oriented in a similar way to Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis. One portal promotes the brute force approach over lateral thinking, while the other will take you on a more cerebral, adventurous journey, focused to a larger extent on the application of spells and solving puzzles.



Any objects you collect, or misappropriate shall we say, can be sold in shops located in certain villages to boost your coffers, while you can also buy an assortment of useful trinkets and weapons with the gold discovered inside pouches.





Traps are littered throughout your treacherous environment, some covert, others far more apparent and easily avoided. You can be strolling along merrily, minding your own business when all of a sudden a gaping chasm opens up beneath your feet, swallowing you whole. An arrow could fly from nowhere, or an opponent could be engaged from out of the blue without warning, so you must keep your wits about you in order to survive. None of these will kill you instantly unless your energy is so low you're dicing with death to begin with, however.



Nonetheless, you're not totally at the mercy of unseen forces in that it's possible to wield trap (or door) revealing spells - these cause the area harbouring the device to glitter, allowing you to shimmy around it to safety. Other magic incantations can be employed to reveal camouflaged bridges, while the descension spell sinks obstacles out of harm's way to grant safe passage, or access any gemstones that may be perched on top.



**Q.** I believe you originally intended to implement an option to replenish your character's energy by sleeping off your injuries. Did you decide against that, or have I just missed it in the final game?

**Jerr:** "That's a question for Ged to be honest. He was more the RPG fan and a lot of that detail came from him. I just wanted to draw and animate!"

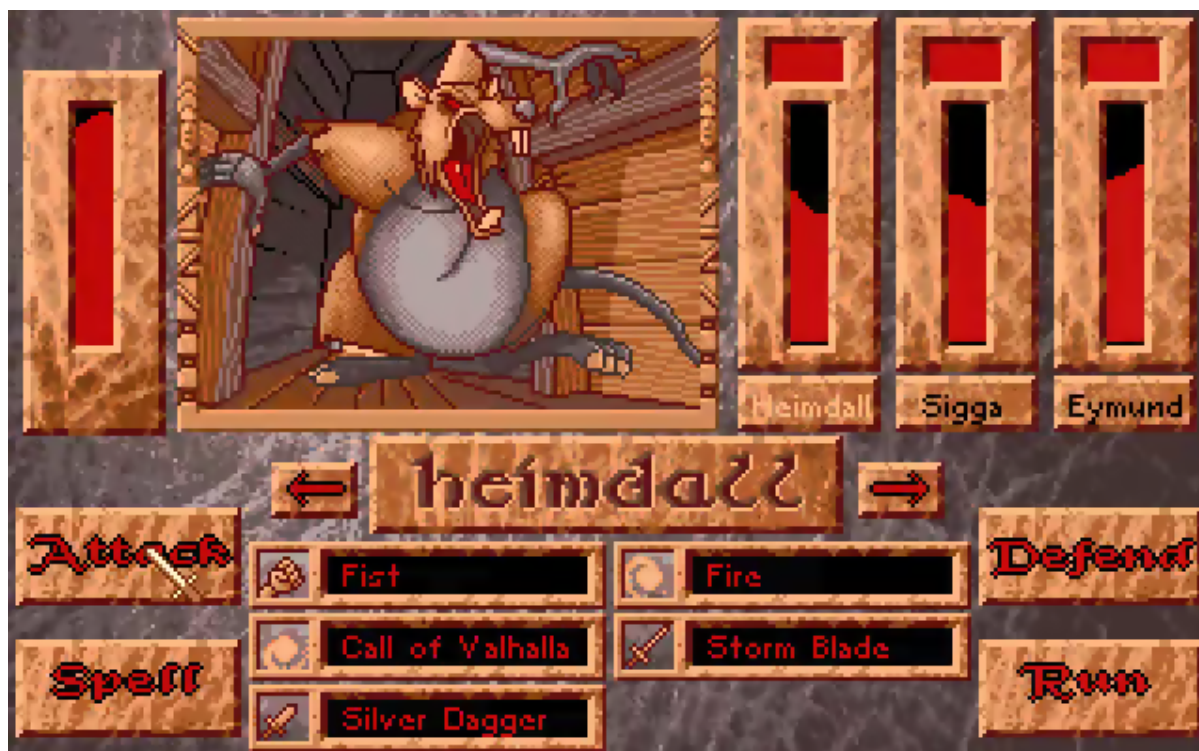
**Ged:** "That was most likely an idea we threw around in the early days but didn't make it to the final design, either that or it was in the game but I can't remember it!"



## Bardagi

As you explore your isometric world you'll soon encounter a variety of adversaries, which you can opt to fight, flee from, or bribe to let you pass. The gruesome menagerie includes goblins, ogres, giants, trolls, rats, mages, sea serpents, ginormous spiders (among the toughest cookies of all, though ice spells are particularly effective in dispatching them), and a whole host of other tormentors that are too numerous to list.





Luckily for us, until we engage with them, they're anchored to the spot waiting politely to be attacked. While this does detract from the sense of peril and immersion in the fantasy world we inhabit, I imagine it was entirely necessary to manage the Amiga's limited resources. Let's not forget that Heimdall was released in 1991 and only intended to run on a standard OCS/ECS Amiga with 1mb of RAM. No A1200 update was ever issued - it wasn't even *compatible* with AGA systems, the original release nor the later budget edition.



**Q.** Did you ever plan for the adversaries seen in the isometric segments to move freely about the environment rather than being stationary?

**Ged:** "Not in the first one, it was a big game to do at that time and we didn't have a huge dev time, plus I was still a young coder learning the trade so we didn't want to risk putting too much in. That was something we really wanted to address in the sequel though."

**Jerr:** "As far as I remember, we wanted to do the combat a bit differently, and have the reaction combat against an animated sequence. So different enemies had to be dealt with by defending or attacking with a timed button click. Therefore the 'in-game' version was simply a marker I guess for the combat sequence."

**Q.** I think I know what you mean. Something like in Dragon's Lair where it's more of an interactive animation than a real-time fighting game?

**Jerr:** "I guess so, I never thought of that before, the Dragon's Lair reference. I simply wanted to make it cartoony!"

**Q.** Was there anything else you hoped to implement, yet weren't able to due to the limitations of the platform?

**Ged:** "There were a few things we didn't get in the first one that would have been cool but did end up in Heimdall 2, a few tricks with the copper list and colour cycling and use of the half-bright mode to create some cool alpha based effects."

**Jerr:** "Wasn't it big enough!! LOL. I didn't keep track, but I read somewhere that there are over 200 individual locations in the game, art-wise, it was hard enough to get all that done. Between the intro, games, location graphics, character animations, fight sequences, maps etc. I was more than happy with the amount we managed to fit in. I guess the end sequence was a bit lacking, but I can't remember if that was down to time or disk size restrictions".



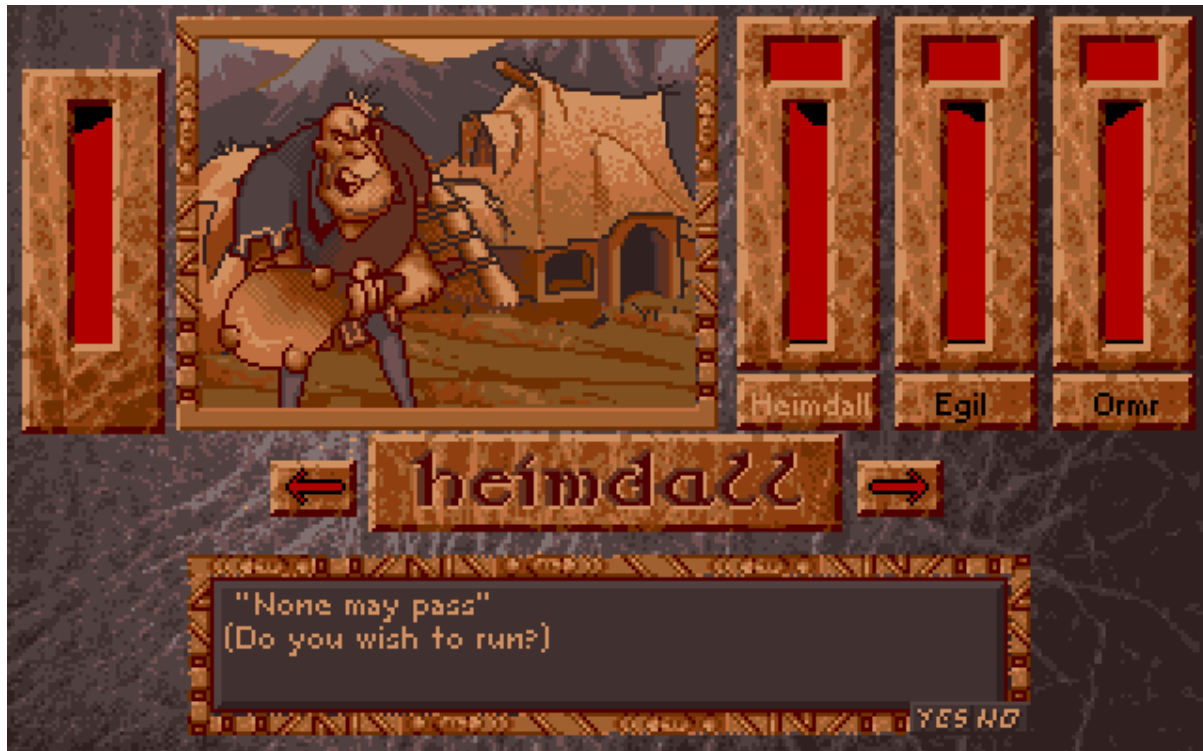
"The dwarf in front of you is looking at your kneecaps with a glazed expression on his face. Do you wish to run?"

Whenever you approach an opponent, your view flips into an icon-driven first-person perspective combat mode that will be familiar to aficionados of the RPG genre. Here you are presented with your means of attack and defence options, along with the health status of your three vagrants displayed

in bars filled with sloshing blood. Your capacity for defence is determined by your current strength status, and impeccable timing of course.



To launch an attack (or defensive) manoeuvre you'd first select the button labelled punch, sword, axe, spell etc. and then click 'attack' to issue the command, hopefully before the vicious slathering troll or whatever has time to make plans of his own. It's advisable to strike just as they are about to draw back their own weapon or fists, leaving themselves vulnerable. It's not the most practical system, really a test of your mouse reflexes, but you get to grips with it soon enough.



Vital to a successful campaign is scouring your environment for the most potent weapons and spells, forging your troupe into a formidable marauding force to be reckoned with. These are mostly acquired by raiding chests during the isometric sequences (ensuring you first disable the booby traps with a spell!), and include the standard sword, thunder blade (which inflicts six times the damage points of an ordinary sword), crystal sword (4x damage), silver dagger (2x, excellent for rapid-fire assaults), storm blade (probably the optimal weapon), adamantine axe (3x), stone axe (4x), rune sword and rune axe (2x, each being blessed by the runesmith), and dagger.

"Your adversary is dead, you've found a scroll. Do you wish to take it?"

Spells are accumulated in the same manner, encompassing mastery of the fire element to engulf foes, divine intervention, curses, those that spray opponents with shards of ice or water or kill giants, teleporting, conjuring a protective force field wall

of energy, invulnerability, expunging enchantments, placing the Bane of the God Baldur on your opponent, resurrecting dead party members, or temporarily bestowing your protagonist with strength equivalent to Vanir or Aesir.

The trick is to allocate spell scrolls to characters with high runelore ratings e.g. the priest because each has its own threshold. If a character fails to meet it, he will be unable to decipher and cast the spell. Each of your party begins with a predetermined runelore rating, based on their *spirituality* I suppose you'd call it, though this can be upgraded by various means including drinking from Mimir's well or Potion R.

Intriguingly, if a runelore-barren character 'examines' a scroll he can't interpret, the writing actually looks like gibberish (a set of runes to be precise), aside from not being able to utilise it. 'Distribute' it to one of the 8 inventory slots of someone who *can* and its function is elucidated. A nice touch I thought.

It's worth noting here that all scrolls should be given the once-over as some of them contain helpful tips rather than magic spells.

"The runes we put on scrolls were coded, they used the futhark runes but we mapped them to English letters. There was one scroll that you couldn't translate in the game but if you did it manually it was a recipe for scones."

- **Ged Keaveney**

Any energy lost in battle can be recouped by buying, stealing or scavenging food, drinking potions, or casting health-restoring spells. There are a plethora of ways to ensure you stay alive as long as you know how and when to deploy them correctly.

## **Bjodja**



It would be all too easy if you could just wander wherever you choose free of impediments, hence you'll find that critical routes and waypoints to accomplishments are embargoed by the necessity to solve puzzles. These are largely of a flick-switch-to-trigger-event nature requiring you to calculate, for example, the correct sequence in which to stand on stone slabs in order to close tombs in the floor, enabling you to pass over them to reach a doorway to an as yet unexplored area.

Other tasks demand that you establish what sort of object an inhabitant seeks, and make their dreams come true by tracking it down and bequeathing it to them. To show their gratitude they'll often offer you a reward, which in turn will allow you to progress that little bit further.

It's like six degrees of separation you see, it's all interconnected. You approach an altar and sip from a chalice to release a villager from his levitation enchantment who donates a market pass to your cause allowing you to break new ground and locate a rune stone and diamond. Permission to pass a hoodie-wearing druid is only granted if you have collected all six power runes, and you'll need to have accumulated an assortment of coloured keys to even reach him in the first place. Throw in a rubber chicken pulley and you'd think you were on Monkey Island.



*Walking on water - "only rune stones make it possible"... sing along now!*

All this culminates in you getting your mitts on a shrinking potion by killing a grey monkey, leading to the retrieval of the first weapon, Thor's hammer, which will now be small enough to slip in your man-bag, or whatever Vikings use to store their valuables.

Elsewhere you realise that to get beyond a giant serpent you'll need to acquire a - you've guessed it! - serpent killer spell. To achieve this you have to place a rune stone, diamond and silver coin on the branches of a tree to release the scroll it's written on - kills 99.9% of known serpents or your Viking moolah back!

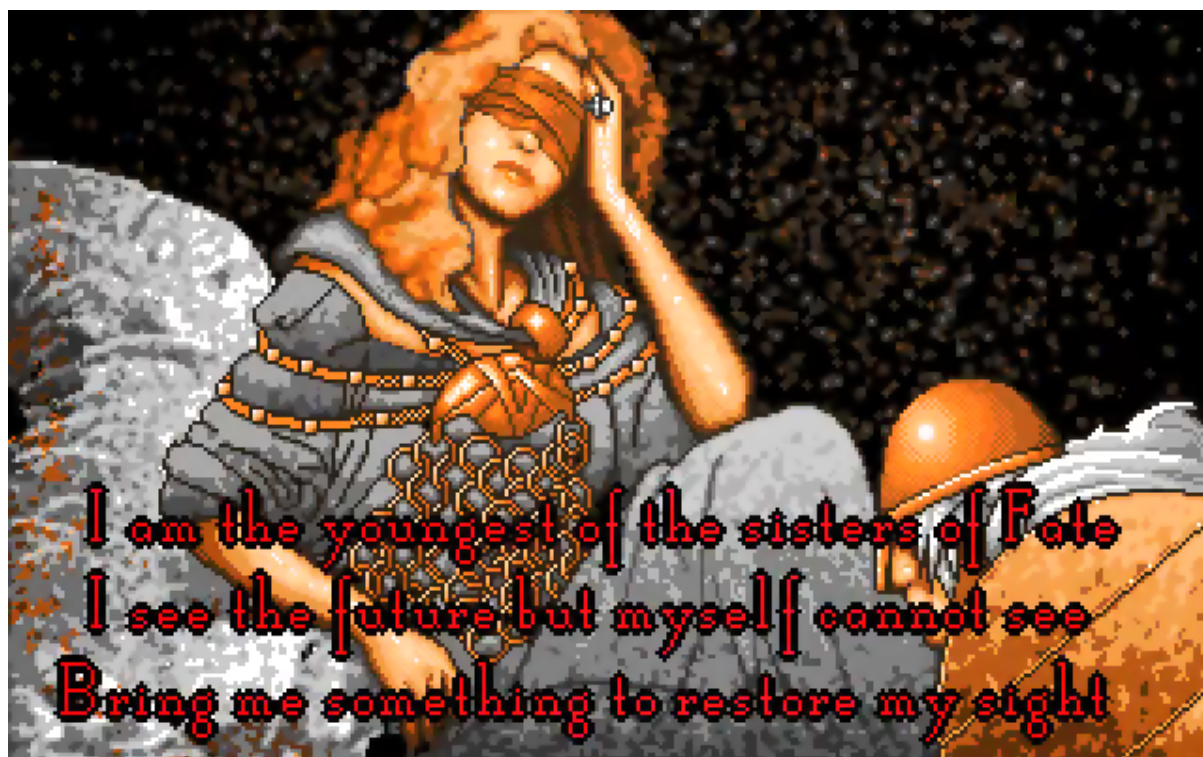


The three sisters of fate - or Norns - loom large in your fetch quests. You must give a necklace (courtesy of the dwarf chap in the room with the anvil) to the eldest as a sign of respect - I

wouldn't argue because she gets to decide "who shall prosper and who shall not".





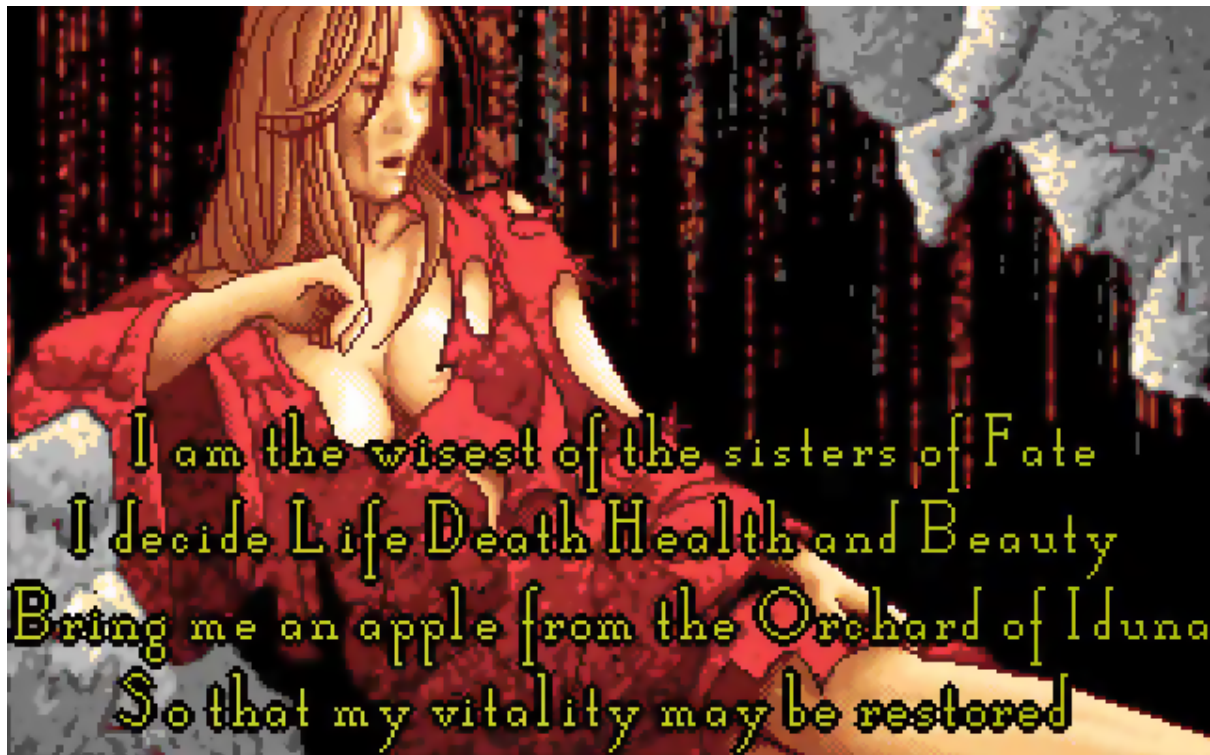


I am the youngest of the sisters of Fate  
I see the future but myself cannot see  
Bring me something to restore my sight



I am the eldest of the sisters of Fate  
I decide who shall prosper and who shall not  
Bring me a necklace as a sign of your respect





Dragon's eggs should be given to the youngest who can "see the future, but myself cannot see" to somehow restore her sight. She could start by taking off that blindfold, that can't be helping!

Finally, the wisest of the sisters - who "decides life, death, health, and beauty" - craves an apple from the orchard of Iduna to restore her vitality. This is earned by giving the Goddess Iduna "something red in exchange" - a ruby perhaps.



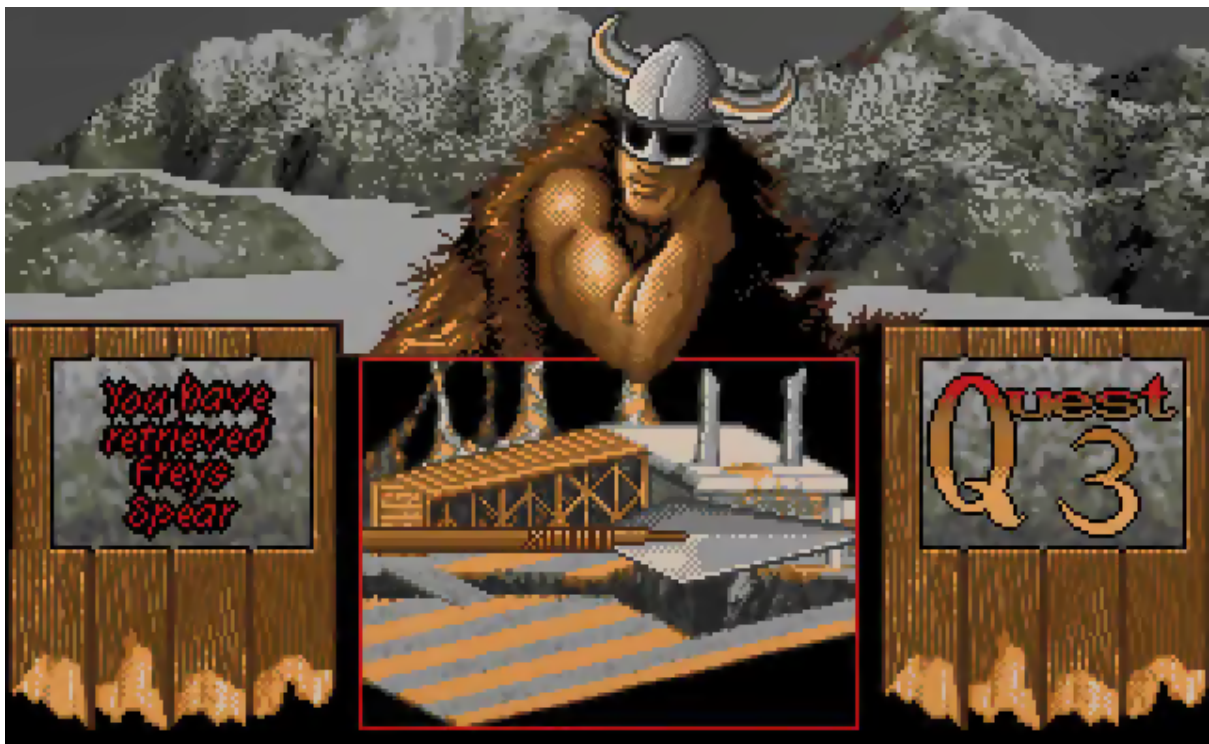
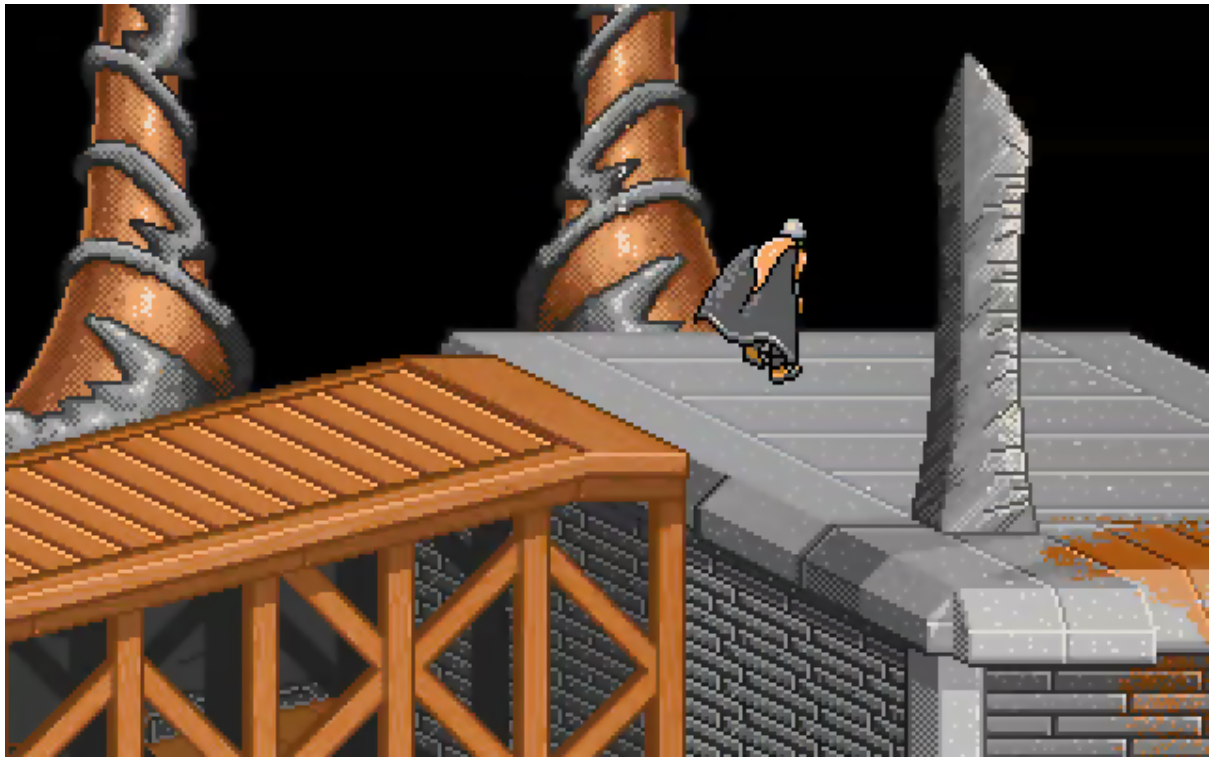
Having performed your Santa Claus impersonation you can travel to the temple at the centre of the island for a reward. Later you enter a giant's library containing a shelf full of curiously titled books - 'Shortcut to Europe', 'Dwarven Human Dictionary', 'Egil's Saga', 'Monk's Habits' and the plugtastic 'Heimdall Part II First Draft' (you see the sequel was planned long before the first game was unveiled).



Duffing up the owner of said library using the giant killer scroll, you use a revelation spell on the books to discover a shrinking spell. This can be cast once standing between two stone pillars to retrieve a now pocket-sized Freyr's spear.









Shortly before you reach the game's climax you hop on several stone floor switches to release a ring. Along with two you collected earlier (one by waving powder under the snout of a boat's formerly inanimate dragon-shaped nautical figurehead, causing it to sneeze loosening said ring from its nose) these are placed upon three circular runic stones instigating the handover of Odin's sword by a statue.







**Q.** Are the busts that appear right at the end of the game based on two of the development staff?



**Jerr:** "I wish you'd sent pics with these questions!! It's so long ago, I honestly can't remember. This was done before my kids were born and one of them is at University now!"

<pictures sent with apologies>

"I'd forgotten them! That's me and Ged. Me with the longer light hair. Must've been for a joke near the end. So long ago (refer back to my son in uni, in my defence!!!).



**Ged:** "Yeah that's Jerr and I, back when I had hair."



Three weapons salvaged, job's a good'un! We're congratulated for returning the weapons to their rightful owners and instructed to prepare for the battle of Ragnarok, the prophetic apocalyptic clash that will decide the ultimate fate of the gods.









## Skorir

Zero awarded the game a score of 92%, zealously declaring, "Heimdall shows that RPGs don't have to be boring - it takes the genre and puts it on the shelf where it's accessible to everyone".

The One did likewise, enthusing "Heimdall is constantly surprising and so huge it's going to be some time before you've exhausted the possibilities", despite not being impressed with the combat system's clunky interface.

CU Amiga trumped them both with a 96% bottom line and a 'Screen Star' award. They concluded with the glowing endorsement, "Heimdall is probably the most ground-breaking game since Ultimate released Knight Lore and Epyx completed work on Impossible Mission and Pitstop II - and that's the highest recommendation I can give it".

Amiga Power were tormented by incessant disk swapping, repetition of graphics and the catatonic baddies in isometric mode, though still lavished the game with generous praise: "The gorgeous graphics are obvious, but the lush animation, effective FRP elements, interesting puzzles, vast size and general assured sense of character and place are less so. They're all here in abundance though." They wound up their assessment with a respectable 86% final score.

88% was Amiga Format's verdict, one they wound up with, "A major RPG, excellent pics combined with tight gameplay".

Amiga Action's review, aside from the final rating being in line with the general consensus (91%) contained the most disturbing comment I've ever read in an Amiga magazine: "Well all I can say is history isn't what it used to be. Core Design have managed to produce a game with all the action bits (hack and slash but unfortunately no rape) with some not so exciting bits (gods, love and magic) and they have made it all interesting."

Yes, that's certainly the trouble with gaming - there's never enough rape to go round. That feel-good Saturday night pastime it's perfectly acceptable to be flippant about in game reviews read by kids. Captain Planet wouldn't have let that slide!

The reviewer goes on to snigger at the word 'puberty' presumably because the first four letters spell 'pube'. Why was an 11-year-old on Amiga Action's payroll? I'm sure there are laws in place to curb child labour.

## **Hafnir**

Heimdall was also released for DOS and the Atari ST in 1992, the Acorn 32-bit in 1993 ("the only proper role-playing game for the Acorn and certainly the only one with men in pointy

helmets" according to Acorn User who pegged it at no. 23 in their top 100 games list), and SEGA CD in 1994.

From a cursory glance, it's hard to tell the floppy disk versions apart, though there *are* a few subtle nuances between the original Amiga game and the later ports that are worth highlighting, particularly where the intro sequence is concerned.

The wood-panelled, glittery axe-disappearing animation is absent from the DOS and Acorn releases. Instead, it has been replaced with two static images - one featuring the axe and one without, with a fade to white transition effect in between. The sequence is missing altogether from the Atari version, as is any music throughout the intro.

A sea/sky background graphic is present in the DOS and Amiga rendition of Core/The 8th Day/Heimdall title screen, while it's a solid blue mass in the Atari ST version.



Also, AWOL is the background graphic seen behind the text synopsis title screens and 'crying viking' animation. If you're running Heimdall via floppy disk and not lucky enough to be using an Amiga, all you'd see is a black void.





The 'Freyr's plan' animated sequence doesn't feature any speech (as deliberately unintelligible as it is in the Amiga original), or finger-tapping sound effect. Similarly, the lightning sound effect is absent from the pregnancy sequence.





Oddly, the colour of the background in the spinning 'earth creation' animation has been switched from the Amiga's red to blue for all the ports, regardless of the media it's delivered on.

With the benefit of three year's hindsight, the SEGA port published by JVC delivered a number of interesting enhancements over the prior floppy-based editions. Heimdall, never too proud to invoke the power of Grayskull (see cover art on Moby Games).



Already classy, the intro sequence is now mostly animated - gorgeous it is too! Any cartoon where the eyebrows are so expressive they operate independently to the owner's face wins my vote! Very reminiscent of Space Ace and Dragon's Lair for obvious reasons.

A digitised voice-over replaces the captioned text, though it's not quite as elysian as it might have been. At one point it even goes all Wiganese when it thinks we're not paying attention: "When the gods awakened they were *saw* distressed."

Enemies encountered in isometric mode are animated, though still super-glued to the spot.

The inventory, character stats and shop screen layouts have been overhauled with graphical icons substituted for button text and item lists, reducing the degree of localisation work required, and arguably making the interfaces more user-friendly, once you've skimmed the manual.



Sadly, they look bland and generic, and the colour palette is all wrong. The black background with gold and stone nuances found in the Amiga version dovetail perfectly with the Viking motif, keeping you entrenched in the relevant era and mindset. A strange decision indeed given that the original theme remains intact for the combat screens.

Tweaked the plot has been, yes. Hmm. Here Heimdall immediately *volunteers* his services, hence is far more instrumental in determining his own fate. Also, the selection of the cottage hit by lightning is portrayed as precisely that, whereas previously it was alluded to as being random. Note that Thor's hammer receives a full name-drop - Mjolnir.

No dock can be seen in the boat-based mini-game, only the longboat itself surrounded by a solid, single hue expanse of sea on all sides, leaving it looking unfinished.

You are no longer required to click the attack button as well as selecting a weapon. Instead, the A button issues the command once you have made your choice.

After killing an adversary you are notified of the number of experience points accrued via a text caption. Attention wasn't drawn to this at all previously.

Accompanying the intro and title screens is some superb new atmospheric panpipes music, replete with Viking chants, possibly intended to invoke the notion of boatswain instructions.

Ultimately, however, it was the same core game re-released three years later, and so was not met with the rapturous applause afforded by the Amiga fraternity.

EGM, for instance, deemed it only worthy of a mediocre 66% score in spite of their upbeat assessment: "A unique puzzle type game with huge levels and a nice mix of action. This will probably keep one playing for hours trying to figure a way out of each room. The selection of different warriors is also a nice touch."

Game Players dropped back two percentage points, concluding, "Pick up Heimdall if you're daunted by The Secret of Mana or Lunar, but if you're looking for a challenge, leave Heimdall on the rainbow bridge."

## Lykd

So that's Heimdall. As someone who doesn't play RPGs, and hadn't dabbled with this light twist on the genre until a couple of weeks ago, I wasn't expecting to lose quite so many hours to it. Hours upon hours I'll *never* get back - not that I'm mourning the loss mind you, it's been a curious odyssey of discovery, even if I *am* completely hopeless at the game and had to fill in

the blanks watching two four hour longplays on YouTube. I was there in *spirit* at least, and that's what counts, isn't it?

What I'm trying to say in my own 'special' meandering way I suppose is that Heimdall has a magnetic charm that can be appreciated for its endearing aesthetic appeal, as well as the novelty of its patchwork gameplay concepts that leave it straddling the fence between pigeon-holes.

That said, it might have been nice to reach some sort of closure having eventually 'completed' the game (he says wiping the blood, sweat and tears from his face!). Instead, it terminates on a cliffhanger, leaving us pondering the upshot of the preordained onslaught.



*The Vikings (1958)*







*Tim Robbins and Imogen Stubbs in Erik the Viking (1989).*

Fear not fellow journeymen (and women), I've done my homework and so can share with you how - according to canonical Norse mythology - the saga concludes...

"During Ragnarok, the gods know that their doom is at hand when they hear the dire call of Gjallarhorn signalling the imminent arrival of the giants, who cross the rainbow bridge to storm Asgard and kill the gods. The disloyal Loki, the particular nemesis of the unwaveringly dutiful

Heimdall, is with them. Loki and Heimdall slay each other as the world burns and sinks into the sea."

Norse Mythology for Smart People by Daniel McCoy

Hmmm... and on that cheery note, I'll bid you goda nott.